

Figeac, 21st March 2017

AB There's real excitement in the air as the primeurs tastings approach. Is it Bordeaux hype or has this new vintage turned into something special?

Frédéric Faye First of all, it's not hype, because the interest already being shown by the wine world is very strong. It's clearly very special. Visitors have been confirming their appointments very early this year. Secondly, the wine has evolved in barrel. It has opened out, it's aromatically very expressive. The excitement is genuine.

AB Isn't it rather unusual for a great wine to reveal itself so early in the calendar, and to such an extent?



Frédéric Faye Perhaps, but there's no doubt that 2016 is an outstanding vintage.

AB One or two of your fellow winemakers have reported that there was a concern about the wine integrating the oak, most probably on account of bad weather over the last weeks. With 100% new oak here at Figeac, was that a worry?

Frédéric Faye Not at all. In fact as early as January, the oak had "melted" into the wine. Now, there may be a good explanation for that. Firstly, we've been trialling barrels for some time now and hopefully have got the right match of oak and wine. However, the more likely reason is our grape composition. The Cabernets don't get this oak integration problem so much, and with two-thirds of Cabernet in barrel, we're not affected. A lot of our barrels also come from Seguin Moreau, because their oak really suits Cabernet. Vieux Château Certan is the only other right bank property I know that buys such a high proportion of oak from that cooerage.

AB A couple of months ago, you weren't sure if 2016 would be on a par with 2010. What are your thoughts today?

Frédéric Faye The picture is clearer now, because the 2016 has developed beautifully in barrel. But it was only when the blend was finally made that the awesome quality of this vintage hit me. I'm so impressed today. The aromatic expression and accessibility of the wine is actually similar to 2015, but this 2016 has something more. And even compared with 2010, I now believe it's a notch above.

AB What does the 2016 have that the 2010 doesn't have?

Frédéric Faye Both vintages are truly great. But what makes the difference is the 2016 vintage's precision, which I'm convinced comes not just from the vintage but also from the progress we have made in all the work we have done since 2010.

AB And what does it have that 2015 doesn't have?

Frédéric Faye 2015 is another great vintage, but 2016 has greater freshness and acidity, and the tannins are more precise.

AB 2010 has not revealed itself quickly. It's still firm, even closed, but maybe one day it will be the greatest modern Bordeaux vintage. Are you sure that 2016 has that potential too?

Frédéric Faye It has all the ingredients, yes.

AB What is the final blend for the 2016?

Frédéric Faye 36% Merlot, 26% Cabernet Franc and 38% Cabernet Sauvignon. So two-thirds Cabernet with a shade less Franc this time. With the dry, hot weather in summer, the Cabernet Sauvignon was in its element, and that's why it has the largest share.

AB How easy was it to reach the right blend?

Frédéric Faye It took us a while. What's tricky is in a tannic year like 2016, when you have both Cabernets in the blend in large quantities, once you go over a certain percentage of Cabernet Franc, the tannins come through too strongly. For example, if we'd gone up to 28 to 30 % of Cabernet Franc the blend wouldn't have had the same harmony. On the other hand, we wanted to maintain the freshness and elegance brought by the Cabernet Franc, which we would certainly have lost if we'd had a lower percentage than 26. There's quite a bit of trial and error in the blending of this type of vintage. A good team of blenders is essential.

AB You've been very keen to promote Petit Figeac, your Second Wine, as a wine in its own right. What impact has the selection of the First Wine had on the blend of the Second?

Frédéric Faye Inevitably, Petit Figeac will have more Cabernet Franc, a bit more Merlot, and a bit less Cabernet Sauvignon.

AB And the proportions of First and Second Wines?

Frédéric Faye We'll be producing more Figeac than last year. Around 100,000 bottles. Which represents around 62% of the production. That will enable us to release a very high quality Petit Figeac with a good quantity of bottles, too.

AB In a few words, how would you describe the tasting characteristics of Figeac 2016?

Frédéric Faye Harmony, elegance, freshness, gentle but good structure, minerality, intensity without austerity, earlier-drinking but with very good ageing potential. As from 8 years, I think it will start to be really enjoyable.

AB And Petit Figeac 2016?

Frédéric Faye Rounder, more immediately enjoyable, but mirroring the First Wine. A window view of Figeac. We call it the Figeac ambassador. However, we won't be giving a tasting of Petit Figeac at the primeurs.

AB Why not?

Frédéric Faye Tasters tend to focus on Petit Figeac and almost forget about the First Wine.

AB Not the other way round?

Frédéric Faye No. I know that it's great that Petit Figeac is getting so much attention, but the point of the primeurs is to present the First Wine. We'll present Petit Figeac to our buyers some time after the primeurs.

AB Figeac nowadays is only presented en primeur at the château. Is it still possible to make an appointment for primeurs week?

Frédéric Faye Yes, even without an appointment, as long as visitors leave their business card at the entrance. We'll find a way of fitting them in. We'll be there from Monday to Friday.